Gift of Gazette 1869/2

19/6

SERMON

—ON—

Ante-Natal Infanticide,

DELIVERED BY

Rev. E. FRANK HOWE,

AT THE

Congregational Church in Terre Haute,

ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 28th,

1869.

TERRE HAUTE, IND.:
Allen & Andrews, Steam Job Printers, Binders, &c., 132 Main Street.

1869.

3-3-

Annex
HQ
767
H855s
1869
c.1

SERMON.

EXODUS XX : XIII.—"*Thou shalt not kill.*"

A mysterious and sacred gift is that of human life. It is mysterious in the time and manner of its imparting by the great Author of Life, mysterious in its departure, and equally mysterious in its character. Whence and how it comes, why and whither it goes, and what it is, who can tell? And this mysterious thing with which we are so familiar, and about which we talk so fluently, and of which we really know so little, is also a most sacred thing. God has so stamped the idea of the sacredness of human life upon the nature of man that to take it, either his own or another's, is ever felt to be one of the worst of crimes. Even when the continuing of it can only give misery, when it is known that soon it must go and the sooner the better, still man touches it not. A laborer was caught in the seam of a huge mass of rock which, after the accidental discharge of a blast of powder, closed again catching him and crushing him above the waist. The poor fellow pleaded with his fellow-laborers to take his life. It would have been a mercy to him for them to have done it. But, though there was no possibility of his removal, or of saving his life, not one of those men would let the life blood flow. When the child becomes idiotic, or the friend falls into hopeless insanity, and parents and friends know and feel that death were better than life, yet none will touch the sacred thing. Old age and the entire loss of human faculties, nonage and the entire absence of all that distinguishes the human from the mere animal, provide no excuse for taking life. Wherever there is human life there is a thing too sacred to be touched for any other reason than the saving of another and more important life. This is written upon the nature of man.

So important is this law that the All-wise Law-giver saw fit to give it a place among the fundamental ten of Sinai, and thus to emphasize the sacredness of human life.

Before I announce my theme, please to notice that the violation of this law constituting the crime of murder, consists simply in the deliberate taking of human life. Only two exceptions are admitted. The first is the taking of life judicially, or by authority of law, and for crime. The second is in defense of another life, including self-defense, and defense of the lives of others either against violence, as when one is attacked, or against natural causes, as when the life of the infant is taken to save the mother. *Murder is the deliberate taking of human life!* It matters not whether the life be taken in a manner giving pain to the victim or not. He who takes life by means of the slow and devilish tortures practiced by the Indians, and he who steals into the bed chamber and inflicts the death-blow upon one whom he has first placed under the influence of chloroform, are both murderers, and one equally so with the other. The crime of murder is the same in both cases, though in the former, the perpetrator adds other crimes to that of murder. The age, then, the consciousness or unconsciousness of the victim, these have nothing to do with the crime. The deliberate taking of human life, with the exceptions named, is murder and comes under the law, "Thou shalt not kill."

At the present day there is growing among us, a disregard for human life that is alarming. Our papers are laden with the details of most outrageous murders. Men are killed upon the slightest provocation. In our own community two murders have been recently committed, and the criminals are at large, and little or no effort is made for their arrest.

But there is another form in which this disregard for human life manifests itself, concerning which I feel myself called upon as a minister of the Gospel, to raise a warning voice. It is with extreme reluctance that I touch the subject, not simply because of its delicate nature, but because I cannot doubt that an evil so wide-spread, has invaded my own church and congregation. It is easy to decry sins at a distance, and to paint them in all their hideousness. But to talk of sins lying at the doors of

those addressed, when these are friends loved and trusted, this is not so easy or pleasant a task. I know that some will be disgusted at the introduction of so delicate a subject into the pulpit. Others will laugh at it. The guilty, if such there be, may be angry. Those who ever cry "Peace, peace," will doubtfully shake their heads. Yet, following the dictates of my own conscience—not, however, until it has long urged me on—I propose to speak plainly, but, I trust, ever with propriety, concerning

THE DESTRUCTION OF UNBORN CHILDREN.

I. First, the question arises: *Is it a sin or a crime to destroy a child unborn?*

It is true that in the ordinary use of language, we reckon the life of man from his birth. Yet we all know that what we term birth, is but one of the changes through which life passes from one stage to another. When life begins we may not be able to demonstrate, but we do know that there is life before birth. Physiologists reckon the beginning of life from the moment of conception. Upon this theory, also, criminal law is founded. In every State, our own included, it is a criminal offense for any person, in any way, or at any time, to attempt the destruction of fœtal life. In fact, the deed of which I am speaking, is generally committed when the parties *know* that there is life to be destroyed. It is the destruction of life that is aimed at. Now it makes no matter that the victim cannot stretch out its hands in defense or deprecation. It matters not that it be not conscious, that it can utter no cry of pain or reproach. The sacred gift of human life is taken—is deliberately taken, and this constitutes the crime, and that crime is murder.

I am fully aware that no demonstration of the criminality of this thing will deter some of those who practice it from a continuance of the practice. While the motives to it continue, while men and women place their own ease and pleasure above God's law, while public opinion is so corrupted that it has no voice of reproach, and while the deed can be committed in such utter secrecy, there is little to be hoped for in demonstrating, no matter how clearly, the criminality of the practice, so far as they are concerned who have deliberately adopted it. But there are many, I believe, who have fallen into the practice thoughtlessly. There are many others who are young, and are yet looking forward, as all do and ought, to married life. In the ears of these thoughtless ones, and in the ears of those, who as yet have no occasion for thought,upon whom the temptation has not yet come, but upon whom it will come, I would to-day sound the true name of this practice. In the ears of the thoughtless I would sound the cry of MURDER! so clearly that henceforth they cannot fail to think. In the ears of those who may hereafter be tempted to the deed, I would cry MURDER! MURDER!! so clearly that at the very thought of the crime, they shall shrink back in horror.

Taking the life of the unborn child is a crime, and that crime is none other than murder. The body of an infant is found whose life has evidently been taken at birth. The community is shocked, the criminal is sought out, brought before our courts and condemned. Where lies the difference between taking that life at birth, perhaps before the first breath was drawn, and doing the same thing one, two or six months earlier? In either case it is the deliberate taking of human life, and this is murder. Put what face upon it the community will, disguise it under whatever name you please, you can make no more nor less of it than simple murder. "Thou shalt not kill," is the law violated.

II. *But is this crime so common* as to demand a place in the pulpit? I would not insult your intelligence by attempting to convince you that it is common. You know it. And yet I doubt if many know how very common it is. Meeting a physician of long and extensive practice, and who is above aiding in such a crime, and whom you would suppose everybody knew to be above it, I asked him how often he supposed he was applied to, to aid in this sort of child-murder, and he promptly responded: "As often as to treat any one disease, and generally by married people." Another and older physician said: "At least every month." Now this is among physicians of the highest standing, and both religious men, and who, on no account, would aid in such a crime. Now take the whole number of physicians in this community, and remember that some are known to disgrace the profession by this criminal but paying practice, and you may have some idea of the frequency with which application is made to the medical profession to aid in this crime. Yet, probably, not one in ten, if, indeed, one in a hundred, goes to the physician. A single caution of the shrewd quack that his medicine will endanger life at a certain period, is the recommendation which sells it to thousands and tens of thousands. Besides these medicines, there are a thousand and one other methods and recommendations which

burden the mails, and which pass from mouth to mouth, aye, and instruments of death which go from hand to hand. Then, too, there is no concealment of the matter. But persons disgustingly boast to one another, on the street and in the parlor, of what they have done, and how often. I know not of ever being more terribly shocked than by accidentally hearing a young wife's description of the little boy she had thus murdered. His size, his plumpness, his hair, all were described, ending with the assertion that "He was a nice little boy." I shudder at the recollection now. Yet this was a woman of character and standing, and the worst of it is, that her boast of this crime did not injure her character or her standing. In fact, neither she nor her hearers seemed to dream that any crime had been committed, but thought rather that a good joke had been perpetrated. We used to be shocked by the report that the mothers of India gave their children to the crocodiles in worship of their gods. But in our day, in our community, in our churches, mothers murder their own children in devotion to fashion and pleasure. Speaking to a friend, in a public place, concerning this crime, he replied: "Why, here is a woman within six feet of us who has killed half a dozen of her children."

*A writer in one of the magazines of the day sets forth this matter in its true light, and at the same time incidentally gives some of the causes of the prevalance of the practice. He says:

"Wealth and fashion have become too generally the great standards aimed at in life. The plain and simple manner of living, with frugal and industrious habits and slow accumulations once practiced, have given way to a more extravagant, luxurious, and stimulating course of life, and an eager struggle for rapid gains. Young men must now commence life where their fathers left off. While men have been, as it were, wholy absorbed in making money, women have become altogether too much immersed in pursuit of mere pleasure and fashion. Nothing must stand in the way of those objects. Among large classes society has become very artificial and intensely selfish, allowing many vices and evils to creep into general practice. Under these circumstances children have come to be considered a care, a burden, and an expense which is thought must, at least to some extent, be dispensed with. In making, therefore, plans for marriage and settlement in life, such troubles are to be avoided as much as possible, especially until the parties get comfortably off in the world. This idea becomes a prevailing purpose in the mind, which is gradually strengthened more and more as other wants increase. Besides, the fear of pain and suffering, the dislike of being confined to the dry routine of certain family duties and responsibilities, the shrinking from public exposure and gossip on account of some domestic change—all these have their influence. In fact, has it not come to this, that in some circles the mere idea of an increase of family is unpopular, unfashionable, if not odious?

The plain teachings of Scripture, the leading objects of the marriage institution as pointed out by the formulas of the Episcopal and Catholic Churches—the two largest religious denominations in Christendom—are entirely ignored. The laws of life and health are set at defiance, and worse expedients are resorted to, in order to effect certain ends, than were ever countenanced by the laws of Malthus. We are shocked at the destruction of human life upon the banks of the Ganges, as well as on the shores of the South Sea Islands; but here in the very heart of Christendom fœticide and infanticide are extensively practiced under the most aggravating circumstances."

I will simply add, what you all know, or may learn by a little inquiry, that this crime is most fearfully prevalent in our day and community. Hence I find the necessity for the warning which I sound in your ears to-day. If this crime is to be stayed the community must be taught that it is a crime, and be warned against its practice. In this teaching and warning the pulpit must join with the press and lecture room. The preacher must join hands with the honest physician. "Sin must be denounced wherever found," was the battle cry with which men preached agaist African slavery, and with which they now preach against intemperance and licentiousness. And here is a sin lurking within our own doors, boasted of, and laughed about in our parlors, practiced in the best of families, thrusting itself into the very church of God, ruining the souls and bodies of its perpetrators, and the fact of its wide prevalance demands of the lovers of truth, and, especially, of them that are set as watchmen upon the walls of Zion, a loud cry of warning and denunciations. It is because I would keep from the crime of murder the young who are to be married in the future, and those of you who are now living in holy wedlock—*holy* wedlock is it, when the natural results are stayed by the crime of murder?—because I would keep you from this crime of murder that I utter this warning to-day

*Harper's Magazine, for February, 1869.

III *I call attention now, to some of the results of this crime.*

First there comes the physical results. Any of our physicians will tell you what these are. Ofttimes death comes as the immediate result. Oftener is this the case than people generally are aware The community is startled by intelligence that a lady, supposed to be in good health, has suddenly died. It is reported that some innocent disease, a congestion, or the like, caused her death, and she is buried with mourning and lamentations, and wonderings at the "mysterious dispensations of Providence." The simple truth, in many of these cases, as physicians will tell you, is, that in efforts to kill the unborn child the woman lost her own life. In many other cases where death does not immediately follow it comes soon after. In many, many more cases, where parties supposed themselves exempt from all the consequences, years of disease and of pain and misery, from which death alone relieves, are dragged out in penalty for past crime. A woman declared that her sister was a fool to be constantly bearing children: that she ought to do as she had done: that she had destroyed six children and it did not hurt her. But in less than a year after the boast, she who made it, was a confirmed invalid, with no hope of recovery, and in direct consequence of that which did her no harm. God does not suffer his laws to be violated with impunity, though it may seem so for a time. For the sake of pleasure, this crime is practiced, and as a result, years of pain follow. For the sake of freedom, this crime is practiced, and as a result, disease binds its galling fetters upon the criminal. To preserve beauty this crime is practiced, and as a result, lines of pain and nervous excitement, are traced on the faded countenance. Would that those who are practicing this crime, might understand, what is really the fact, that they bear the marks of their criminality upon their very countenances. The physical results are so terrible, that it would seem that these alone would deter from this crime. But here it is true, as of old, that "The prudent foreseeth the evil and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished." These physical results however are not all.

In the second place, *home is destroyed* or robbed of one of its richest elements The family is a divine institution, and in God's plan children are a necessary part of it. And they who attempt to establish a family without children, grasp only at the shadow. One of the very sweetest and purest of all the sweet joys of domestic life comes through the presence of children, of one's own children, in the household. It is not only a fountain of joy in itself, but it adds depth, and purity, and sweetness to all the other joys of home. The selfish, grasping demon of gain, which possesses, too largely, the hearts of men, may sneer that they are expensive luxuries.—The hard hearted woman of fashion and lover of pleasure—and few hearts are harder than hers—may snarl that they are nuisances. Then, if in spite of herself, she happens to be a mother, and her little one is lost, she will wail the loudest, and complain the most bitterly. The true man finds a joy in the prattle of his little ones, in their climbings upon his knee, and in their sports, which makes his home brighter, his labors lighter, his joys deeper, and which often drowns his sorrows. The mother, whose lot is harder by far, finds her happiest hour the first of her motherhood, and from that hour there flows for her a joy sweeter, deeper, and more satisfying than any other of earth. She may often feel burdened and worn, but as she looks upon her jewels, and there come welling up in her heart a mother's honest pride and joy, she says, "It pays, it more than pays." Would that I had power to paint for you the fashionable, pleasure-loving, childless wife. I would tell you freely and fully of her freedom from care, her freedom to ride and walk when it pleases her to attend church, parties, balls and theatres. I would show her running freely and gaily hither and thither in pursuit of this pleasure and that, and just hint at her longings unsatisfied. Then I would take you to the mother, as she watches beside the cradle of her child, or as she dandles him upon her knee, or as she wheels him forth to green fields, or along the street, where the admiring glance given her child by each passer, sends a thrill of joy through her own heart, or, as she lays him down to rest, and listens to his little prayer, and then bends over to give and receive the good-night kiss. Could I tell you of these, and the thousand other joys of a mother's heart, how mean and senseless would seem the butter-fly life of the childless woman of fashion and pleasure. And though so mean it were, yet purchased by the crime of murder.

Then as children pass beyond the age of infancy and the boy verges on to manhood, and the girl to womanhood, how bright the hopes that kindle, how full of joy the labors, and even the denials, for the sake of the son or the daughter; and how

full of gladness are the hearts of mother and father, at each success gained, and each promise realized

Next, the children pass to manhood and womanhood, and the parents to old age. How full of joy are the gatherings at the old homestead, the meeting of returning sons and daughters. How proud—an honest, joyous, holy pride it is—the mother over such a son, and the father over such a daughter. And how gloomy the home of the childless aged. The aged companions have nothing of which to think but their aches and pains. There are no ready feet to run on needful errands upon which their aged limbs can-not go, or go only with pain and weariness. There are no present children to smooth the downward path of life, and no absent children to lighten the heart with messages of love, or tales of hope or success. Go from one of these chill, childless homes of the aged, to that where the aged father and mother have about them those ready to do their bidding, glad in some way to pay, even in the smallest degree, the debt they owe those who have borne and nurtured them, regarding any sacrifice but small when given in behalf of father and mother. Listen to the chat of the old man as he tells of this child or that, and watch meanwhile the joyous flush which mantles again the mothers wrinkled and sunken cheek. Witness all this joy which children of youth give to old age, and tell me, is it wise to murder to be deprived of this?

Then, too, the influence of children must not be omitted.

The thought that I am a parent, and to my hands are committed the temporal and spiritual interests of this child, has awakened many a man and woman to their true dignity and responsibility. I recollect well that among the first candidates for church membership, whom I examined, were two young mothers, both of whom attributed their conversion to the impression made upon their minds by the birth of their first children. They felt then the responsibility of life, and the need of divine assistance as never before.

In this connection comes the influence of constant thought and care for others, which is a powerful antidote to selfishness. Leave a man and woman alone to do as they please, free to go and to come, free to have every thing in the house just as and where they choose, with none but themselves to think of and care for, and if the devil can devise a better school for selfishness, I do not desire to see it. Who has not witnessed the utter transformation of selfish, uncomfortably trim, and easily annoyed people, by the coming of a little one to the household? In the birth of the child, the parents seem to have passed through a new birth also, I tell you "It is not good for man to be alone," and it is hardly better to spend ones life in a childless home. Our better natures suffer in consequence.

When I think thus of the joys which come to the houshold with children, and which abide there while the children live, and leave a sweet memory when they are gone hence; when I think of the influence which they exert, checking the evil within us, and encouraging the good, I can but pity, and wonder at the short-sighted selfishness which lets all this slip, and grasps at a few days or years of present freedom, freedom to run hither and thither, freedom to eat and sleep quietly, to get a little more gain or a little more pleasure, and to be a little more fashionable.

In what I have said, I would, by no means, speak lightly of the toils and cares and pains of the mother. These, I know, are often great, and God knows that we who are men, ought to have a deeper sympathy for these, than we sometimes do. But if the toils, and cares, and sometimes, the pains of the mother are great, greater than man's, so are her joys, also. But the point I would make is this:—*When once that state is entered wherein lie these toils and cares and pains, they must not be avoided by crime.* That they may not be, I have tried to set forth this crime in its proper light, and also to tell of its results, and then, also, of the blessings which come in the way of obedience to law.

Neither would I lay the guilt entirely upon woman, for I believe that often man, by his connivance, and perhaps quite as often, by his neglect of wife, and very, very often by his selfish seeking of his own pleasure or comfort regardless of hers, becomes equally guilty, and perhaps more so.

I would not utter words needlessly harsh to those who have sinned ignorantly or thoughtlessly. Repentance and forsaking sins past will secure pardon.

I have spoken plainly and strongly, but, I believe, no more strongly than the subject demands. I honestly believe that, in the sight of God, the practice against which I lift my voice in warning, is nothing less than murder. Thus I desire to stamp it with its true name.

Practice it ye who will, but remember the crime.

As I leave the subject, I desire to say, that the truth can be easily laughed or joked away. I invite discussion and honest criticism. But foolish gossip and vile jesting, careless ridicule, or a determination not to be convinced, these, I pray you, let not one be named among you. Remember God's law,

"THOU SHALT NOT KILL."

TERRE HAUTE, IND.
APR 19